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TWELVE

CHRONOLOGY OF A MYSTERY—

The Strange Case Of 'Lt. Schaefer' And 'ARA'

On the night of last Jan. 30 a telephone rang in the city room of The Daily Journal and the night editor heard a man say in a hoarse, rasping voice "This is Lieut. Schaefer of the American Republican Army, join me, join me, join me."

In the ensuing two months Lieut. Schaefer became a byword in the Elizabeth area. His story was carried in newspapers, on the radio and on television.

It engaged the almost full time attention of municipal and county police, state police, the FBI and security agents of the insurance underwriters' agency.

During this time there were mystery telephone calls, fanciful letters, incitement to armed revolt and at least one secret meeting with a tipster afraid for her life.

And during the suspense-filled period "Lieut. Schaefer," or persons claiming to be "Lieut. Schaefer," took credit for five lumberyard fires, in which damage exceeded \$450,000, desecration of 1,500 cemetery headstones and the crash of an airliner with the loss of 95 lives.

'First Solution'

Once the police thought the Schaefer mystery was solved with the arrest of two Elizabeth brothers who said they were "the lieutenant."

But while the brothers were in the county jail, there was another lumberyard fire, another phone call from "Lieut. Schaefer" and another letter preaching the Schaefer message of "overthrow the imperialists."

Now two Linden men and a youth are in custody and law enforcement officials say one of the trio admits he is "Lieut. Schaefer." Linden Police Chief

County Prosecutor H. Douglas Stine say there is evidence to corroborate the statement of Robert Zarinsky, 21, of 402 Bower St., Linden, that he is the real "Lieut. Schaefer."

In the January 30 telephone call the man who identified himself as "Lieut. Schaefer" spoke rapidly, with agitation and a sense of great urgency.

Words tumbled, one on another, as he implored the editor for help, rallied at the imperialists, predicted the overthrow of the government and an end to oppression.

Then the caller boasted that he and fellow members of the ARA had set fire to the Nadel Brothers Lumber Yard in Linden.

Phone Call Verified

The editor called the Linden police and they confirmed the caller's statement. The lumber yard was ablaze.

The next morning, an assistant editor received a call from a man who identified himself as "Lieut. Schaefer." The newsmen was unaware of the calls on the previous night and he did not yet know of the lumberyard fire.

When he turned to the stories to be handled that day he saw there had been a fire the night before at the Nadel Lumber Co.

About an hour later, the same desk assistant took another telephone call and again the caller identified himself as "Lieut. Schaefer."

He began another torrent of words but the newsmen halted him and said "Lieutenant, you'll have to speak slower, if I'm to help you. Tell me what your problem is."

The caller again spoke of the goal of the American Republican Army, overthrow of the im-

perialists, and said "You know our boys knocked off those radar towers out west last year and there will be more fires and explosions."

At this point the newsmen signaled fellow workers to try and have the call traced and he asked "Did you people set the lumberyard fire in Linden last night?"

"Oh yes," the caller said, "one of our teams threw an incendiary bomb. And that is only the beginning. There will be more." In response to a question "the lieutenant" also said his agents had set fire to the Allied Lumber Yard in Linden last summer.

"Lieut. Schaefer" proved himself to be alert. The newsmen offered to assign a reporter and photographer to do an illustrated story on the American Republican Army.

Offer Declined

"Oh no," said the lieutenant. "If I did that the imperialists would catch me and put me in jail."

The assistant editor had two thoughts—keep the caller on the phone and try to establish a contact to maintain communication should there be future fires.

He asked "Lieut. Schaefer" to notify the Journal the next time he intended to set a fire. The "lieutenant" politely agreed but said he would call five minutes after each fire, the before. He asked how to notify the Journal.

The assistant editor had him to call the paper, not if the fires were set at night or on weekends, he instructed the "lieutenant" to call him at home, and gave his home telephone number.

At this point the caller hung up. Although the conversation

Linden police were notified of "Lieut. Schaefer's" boast that he had set the lumberyard fire and detectives took a statement from the newspaperman.

The assistant editor phoned his wife, and as a precaution, told her not to be surprised if a "Lieut. Schaefer" called to report a fire or an explosion. He explained the events of the morning.

The call was a fortunate precaution. The newsmen was occupied with private business that evening and did not arrive home until 9 o'clock.

When he walked in the door his wife said "Lieut. Schaefer called and said he set a lumberyard fire in Rahway."

True to his promise, "Schaefer" had called the home of the newsmen about 8:30 and left the message that his agents had set fire to the Rahway Builder's Supply Co. in St. George Ave.

The newsmen's wife phoned the Journal and as her call was taken "Lieut. Schaefer" was talking to the paper's night editor, giving him a report of the blaze. A call to the Rahway police verified that the blaze had started approximately five minutes before the lieutenant's calls.

Week Of Quiet

"Lieut. Schaefer" was quiet for a week. On Feb. 7 the Journal received the first letter from the lieutenant. It was addressed to the assistant editor who had taken the second telephone call.

The lieutenant said "I promise to give you my fullest cooperation in any way I possibly can. But in exchange I will expect the Journal to print this letter on the front page upon receipt."